

JSA Type 2 Passive Headphone Conditioner

by Nicholas Ripley

Vertex AQ, well-known purveyors of RF and microphony-busting devices to the discerning audiophile, doesn't have quite the same traction in personal audio circles, but with the creation of its sister

JSA brand, that looks set to change.

Currently, JSA has just two models in its line-up; the Type 1 and Type 2 Passive headphone conditioners with suggestions of a headphone amp to follow. We got the Type 2, with high-grade cotton insulated solid-core silver wiring, a labyrinth construction suggested to reduce microphony and vibration transmission, and a combination of Vertex AQ's best EM and RF interference absorption devices. The cheaper, cut down Type 1 is 60cm shorter and a kilo lighter. There are optional more up-market input jack cables featuring the same solid core silver wiring in 0.6m and 1m lengths, which we also received.

The JSA is about as straightforward as it gets in terms of installation. There are two ¼" TRS stereo jack sockets – you plug the male-to-male input jack cable into one, you plug the other end of that cable into your headphone amplifier, then plug your headphones into the remaining socket on the JSA. That's it. You could spend weeks fussing over which jack socket sounds better to the headphone, and which sounds better to the amp, and conclude it makes no difference. It's a purely passive conditioner block.

There are two ways of testing this. The wrong way is to act like a 1920s telephone operator, moving jack plugs in and out and performing quick-fire AB comparisons. You will hear a difference, but may not be able to ascertain what that difference is, why the difference counts, and ultimately whether your headphones are materially better with the JSA 'in' or 'out'. Instead, treat it as if it is a permanent fixture to your headphone listening for a week or two, then remove it and see whether you can live without it. Chances are, you can't.

Where a swift move up the headphone amplifier market generally gives increased levels of detail and dynamic range, there can be a point where you are getting a lot of information and not a lot of musical integrity. The sound is precise, but lacking coherence. The JSA restores that coherence and musical clarity, but not at the expense of the extra information a better amp provides. It sounds like the JSA is bringing out the best of the equipment it slots between. This is hard to put into words, and takes some time for you to parse, but it makes more sense of the music, whatever music is playing. As I listen to quite a lot of modern classical that accents the need to work at a piece of music in order to understand it, before you get all the surface elements of metre and rhythm, the JSA's ability to bring some order to the chaos is welcomed. It also works to



open up avenues of music normally closed to the listener, because they simply make more sense. I'm not a big blues fan, but I could understand the appeal of Howling Wolf here, because his voice was raspy and visceral, and not simply yet another music entity.

The best thing I can say about the JSA is it made me more of a headphone listener. I remain huffily old-school in my audiophile aspirations, and think of headphones as a modern necessity than a go-to place for my music. After spending some time with the JSA Type 2, I'm more into the whole headphone experience. The JSA is that good! +

DETAILS

Dimensions: 220mm x 105mm x 45mm

Weight: 5kgs

Price: £330 (£350 in gunmetal)

Manufactured by: Vertex AQ

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